

United States Air Force (USAF) Air Expeditionary Force (AEF)

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Executive Summary

The USAF Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) is designed to provide CINCs with RAPID, RESPONSIVE, and RELIABLE airpower options that meet specific theater needs by providing a wide range of capabilities. These forces are used to augment existing land-based forces when necessary. In turn, the AEF was developed to allow the National Command Authorities (NCA) access to a rapid response air force from CONUS without having to maintain an immediate readiness force in-theater. The savings over an in-theater air force is substantial and provides the NCAs the flexibility to wait until the last minute to commit air forces.

The Air Expeditionary Force is a specifically tailored package of fighter/bombers, associated personnel, and support equipment possessing the characteristics of rapid deployment/employment of a light and lethal design. The primary role of the AEF is to maintain a level of force presence in the Area of Responsibility (AOR), provide deterrence during periods of heightened tensions, and to augment the existing ground forces. This force would provide precision air-to-ground, air-to-air, and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) capabilities.

Since the Air Expeditionary Force is in its infancy, the Air Force is just beginning to develop the AEF's capabilities, feasibility, and functionality. The Concept of Operation has been developed and validated by Central Command (CENTCOM) but has not been

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organized or tested in any other Command's Areas of Responsibility (AOR). The Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Chief of Staff developed a strategy for the 21st Century that encourages the AEF concept and provides the framework for future expeditionary exploration. This paper provides a synopsis of the CENTCOM AEF, provides recommendations for future AEFs, and suggests the possibility of an AEF force in a Central African scenario. The dramatic changes in the world threat environment has encouraged the need for military forces to develop capabilities to meet the challenges of today. The AEF concept is one technique the Air Force is developing to ensure the USAF remains the world's premiere fighting air force.

Table of Contents

- I. The Changing World Environment
 - A. NATO/UN Influence
 - B. U.S. Turning Inward
 - C. The Air Force Compromise
- II. Air Force Aligns Strategy with National Strategy
- III. CENTCOM's AEF Concept of Operations
- IV. CENTCOM's AEF Proof of Concept
 - A. AEF I
 - B. AEF II
 - C. AEF III
- V. CENTCOM's Lessons Learned
- VI. Expanded Horizons
- VII. Central Africa Example
 - A. Scenario
 - B. U.S. Response
 - C. AEF Composition
 - D. Mission Frag Order
- VIII. Challenges
- IX. Recommendations
- X. Conclusion

The United States Air Force

Air Expeditionary Force (AEF)

The Changing World Environment

Because of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the dominating role of the Armed Forces in Desert Storm in 1991, the increased emphasis on Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW), and the desire of the American people to focus on domestic issues, the Armed Forces of the United States has been forced into a painful downsizing process. No longer is the focus on a single, all powerful, linear enemy such as the Soviet Union or Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard, where mass and technology drive the victor. On the contrary, U.S. forces are facing a new enemy: a non-linear threat that could be anything from Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) in nature to possible terrorist activity in an urban environment. The U.S. Forces are providing support to non-traditional scenarios that include everything from humanitarian aid to providing police forces to practically anywhere in the world.

As the military transitions from the 'traditional' type of western warfare to the nontraditional support role, the government has been forced to take a hard look at the current military force structure. Some on Capital Hill see the current situation as a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), while others see it as an opportunity to place more emphasis on domestic concerns. With the United States being the only remaining true Super Power and the force structure still reminiscent of nuclear deterrence posturing, cuts to the defense budget are far from over. The decision makers in Washington see this as an opportunity to shift focus.

History seems to repeat itself as it provides the valuable “crystal ball” insight into the future. Following WWII, the U.S. military took an incredible cut in force structure but the country’s leadership thought it necessary to increase the pace of worldwide military support to guarantee the balance of power throughout the world. For the past six years the military has taken similar cuts in defense spending and personnel; however, the operational tempo of our men in arms has not decreased. On the contrary, the pace of operational deployments has increased an unprecedented 300 percent over the last 5 years. So, it is not surprising the U.S. has followed suit post Cold-War. Of course, there are differences in historical linear warfare compared to the modern/future battlefield of non-linearity, but the basic tenets of why one goes to war is still consistent with the past. The main difference in history and the present is the types of missions expected of the men in arms.

NATO/UN Influence

No longer are conflicts unilaterally dominated by the U.S., but with the expansion of NATO and the ever-increasing dominance of the UN, the multilateral support structure has increased the scope of engagement philosophies. The U.S. has taken the “Godfather” role in providing the preponderance of force in support of UN requirements. U.S. mission involvement has increased the operational tempo during a time of military downsizing that has encouraged a change to force projection around the world. Furthermore, troops are forced to engage in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) with little, if any, training. This has required a fundamental shift in military operations.

U.S. Turning Inward

In turn, with the security of the U.S. not being threatened by any opposing force in the future and the defense budget being scrutinized on all fronts, the desires of the American people to primarily focus on the domestic front has taken center stage. The present concerns include monumental efforts to save Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security, and positive steps by the government to decrease the federal debt. The last thing the American people want to hear is a desire by our government to increase defense spending or provide a military police force to the likes of Central Africa. This has caused all the services to take a close look at the way their forces are structured and to trim excess fat wherever possible. For example, the Air Forces' funding for new programs, such as the B-1/B-2/F-22, are being scrutinized and could face possible termination. New plans for modernization of older weapon systems are taking front stage, i.e., the B-52. Following the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) the Air Force will more than likely be down to 18 Fighter Wings -- in 1989 the plan was to have a mammoth fighter force of 42 Fighter Wings.

The Air Force Compromise

The picture may seem bleak for the Air Force, but it isn't devastating. All the services are having to be creative to meet budget constraints. So what measures is the Air Force taking to ensure a quality product for the American people? For starters, the Air Force is utilizing the joint arena to accomplish mission essential tasks. Although this has lightened the load a great deal this paper will not address joint operations. Instead

the aim will focus on a fundamental change to the Air Force mentality -- one of *Global Engagement*.

The Air Force has taken extreme measures to ensure an effective force structure that provides a quality product with minimal cost to the tax-payer. One technique the Air Force is testing is the concept of expeditionary air power providing near real time support from the Continental United States (CONUS) to practically anywhere in the world. The Air Force is calling this air power revolution an Air Expeditionary Force (AEF). This paper will focus on the Air Force attempt to cut force structure without decreasing capability -- specifically the AEF Concept of Operations (COO). As well, it will describe the previous three AEF deployments and their effects on force projection, provide an African scenario that will validate its capabilities in the Southern European Command's (EUCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), and, finally, provide recommendations for future AEF deployments. CENTAF developed a Concept of Operations (COO) for the AEF in the CENTCOM AOR and has exercised its capabilities three times since October 1995. Although the AEF is in its infancy and only exercised by CENTCOM, all commands are taking a close look at how they might utilize a similar force in their AOR.

Air Force Aligns Strategy with National Strategy

With the National Security Strategy providing insight for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to develop a National Military Strategy focused on Engagement and Enlargement, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) made it clear that no longer is force protection the sole responsibility of the military. Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), which may include missions of humanitarian relief, democratic support, or

military police forces, are but a few of the National leadership needs. This is not to say that the Air Force is unable to handle the change. On the contrary, the Air Force is aligning its focus with the National Interests and *Joint Vision 2010* (the current vision of the CJCS for the 21st Century). In response to this request, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Ronald Fogleman and the Secretary of the Air Force, Mrs. Sheila Windnall, produced the vision for the Air Force in the 21st Century -- *GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT* .

Heavy emphasis is placed on the Air Force's ability to stand up to the plate when, where, and however requested by the NCAs. Until 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Air Force was part of the nuclear deterrence package providing 24 hour alert status as their most important mission. The support structure was massive and developed with a linear, mass oriented strategic objective. Even during Desert Shield and Desert Storm the military had an overabundance of time to develop the rear area with all the needed support. However, following the end of Desert Storm and the re-deployment of troops and equipment back to CONUS, Saddam Hussein began the laborious effort of rebuilding his military. By 1994, there was concern that Saddam had the ability to mass a ground force large enough that the allied forces in garrison could not defend Kuwait. Of greater concern was that if Saddam decided to go through with an offensive game plan the American forces would need a rapid reaction force that could augment in-place forces within a few days. There was nothing on the books to make this happen. The cuts in force structure following Desert Storm through 1994 forced the Air Force to examine alternative means to the robust in-theater forces of the past.

CENTCOM's AEF Concept of Operations

In August 1995, the CENTAF Commander, General John Jumper, developed the concept of an Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) "...that would be designed to provide CINCs with RAPID, RESPONSIVE, and RELIABLE airpower options that meet specific theater needs by providing a wide range of capabilities."¹ These forces augment existing land-based forces when necessary.

The CENTCOM's Air Expeditionary Force's design allows the National Command Authorities (NCA) a rapid response air force from CONUS without maintaining an immediate readiness force in-theater. An in-place, fully operational force is substantially more expensive than CONUS based forces and considerably less combat capable. The international flight restrictions during non-combatant operations do not allow for adequate training; thus, the pilots are less proficient than if trained regularly in CONUS and deployed rotationally. The AEF concept is for CONUS based forces to maintain alert status until called upon and to augment in place forces until reinforcements are in place.

The Air Expeditionary Force is a specifically tailored package of fighter/bombers, associated personnel, and support equipment possessing the characteristics of rapid deployment/employment of a light and lethal design. The primary role of the AEF is to maintain a level of force presence in the Area of Responsibility (AOR), to provide deterrence during periods of heightened tensions and to augment the existing ground forces. This force would provide precision air-to-ground, air-to-air, and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) capabilities. A typical AEF consists of the following assets:

12 Air-to-Air (F-15C or F-16)

12 Precision Guided Munitions (PGM) (F-15E or F-16)

6 Suppression of Enemy Air Defense (SEAD) (F-16 HTS)
6 Bombers (B-52/B-1/B-2)

The fighters would deploy to their designated locations, regenerate, and take-off as soon as possible to hit targets within the AOR. The bomber force would have the ability to take off from CONUS and strike targets enroute and land at the designated base for further tasking. This is a fundamental shift in the way the Air Force, and for that matter, the Armed Forces, has provided force projection in the past. The preferred method up to the recent is to deploy adequate forces to support a worse case scenario. The AEF concept is to be a lean, low cost, decisive force used to augment in place forces until adequate build-up is in place. The goal is to take only what is required for the operation.

CENTCOM's AEF Proof of Concept

Combat analysis shows that current JTF/SWA land-based forces require augmentation to win against the current threat in the AOR. General Jumper's idea has been exercised three times to date:

AEF I - Shaikh Isa, Bahrain from 30 Oct - 18 Dec 95

The force consisted of:

12 F-16CG aircraft from the 347 WG (Moody AFB)

6 F-16CJ from 20 FW (Shaw AFB)

516 total personnel deployed to support the AEF OPERATION

SOUTHERN WATCH (OSW).

A total of 705 sorties were flown. The first Operation Southern Watch sortie was launched 10 hours after arrival. The AEF concept was validated with a 95% scheduling effectiveness.

AEF II - Azraq, Jordan from 12 Apr - 26 Jun 96

The force consisted of:

12 F-15C from 1 FW (Langley AFB)

12 F-16CG from 347 WG (Moody AFB)

6 F-16CJ from 36 WG (Mt Home AFB)

4 KC-135R from 97 ARW (Fairchild AFB)

1150 total personnel in support of Operation Southern Watch

918 sorties were flown in support of Operation Southern Watch. The force deployed from CONUS in less than 48 hours validating the “RAPID and RESPONSIVE” AEF characteristics.

AEF III - Doha, Qatar from 2 Jul - 21 Aug 96

The force consisted of:

12 F-15E from 4 FW (Seymour-Johnson AFB)

12 F-15C from 33 FW (Eglin AFB)

6 F-16 CJ from 20 FW (Shaw AFB)

4 KC-135R from 319 ARW (Grand Forks AFB)

2 B-52G from 2 BW (Barksdale AFB)

1086 personnel

A total of 1367 sorties were flown in support of Operation Southern Watch (OSW). The force deployed from CONUS to Udari Range, Kuwait. A mature

concept that was RAPID, RESPONSIVE, AND RELIABLE while implementing enhanced force protection measures was validated.²

To date the only AEF Concept of Operation has been written and validated by CENTCOM. The CJCS familiar with the concept of operation is optimistic that it will provide the augmentation needed if Saddam Hussein attempts an offensive operation as in-place forces are inadequate to meet the task.

Lessons Learned

Several concerns have surfaced since the introduction of the AEF's Concept of Operations. The most critical is the agreement requirements with the host nation. For the AEF to be effective in its original concept it must have a Forward Operating Base (FOB) prepared and operationally maintained by the host nation. The primary concern for CENTCOM is that our current Arab friends are prone to change their position -- especially if other Arab nations in the area are not supportive of the Western agenda. The Arab community has their differences but have a difficult time supporting western objectives, especially if they are against another Arab nation -- for example, current dialogue with Jordan has surfaced that makes Azraq future AEF operations questionable. So, it is critical for the host nation to be in agreement with the likely actions of the AEF. A written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) or doctrine based regulation must be coordinated to establish an airfield as an adequate FOB.

Part of having a supportive Host Nation means that the facilities and equipment must be properly cared for. For example, Harvest Falcon (POL) equipment did not meet standards upon the survey team's arrival during AEF III. This caused major problems

with fuel leaks due to dry rotted hoses, gaskets, and tires. Although no sorties were lost due to the poorly maintained POL facilities, the possibility for accidents increased drastically.

A third concern is the positive relationship the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) team must have with the host nation. OSI provides the required immediate threat situation upon the AEF arrival. During AEF III, off-base officials were unwilling to work with the OSI personnel that caused execution delays. The bottom line is that the host nation must be in full cooperation with the AEF commander to ensure a smooth transition into theater.

Other lessons learned have included Command and Control (C2), Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Information, Intelligence (C4I2), and safety -- especially with munitions storage and disposal, weather, maintenance, contracting, transportation, supply, civil engineering, hospital, legal, and air traffic control.³ If these areas are not dealt with prior to deployment the commander could be unnecessarily distracted from his mission.

Expanded Horizons

One can see that there are many considerations to ensure a smooth transition into a foreign nation's territory. As well, the basic logistic needs to bed down approximately 30 aircraft and 1100 personnel requires detailed planning and prior coordination. The current FOB facilities are adequate and so far the host nation's support has been outstanding; but what happens when the CENTCOM AEF concept is not sufficient or the

NCAs request AEF support in Africa in support of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)?

CENTCOM does not have to deal with this type of scenario as they specifically focus the AEF as an augmentation force with prior Host Nation coordination. To date, CENTCOM has full support in Southwest Asia. Although each scenario is unique, CENTCOM has developed the basic AEF concept and is sharing their successes with all major commands. I will suggest that the AEF will become the standard within the Air Force in the near future. As the Marines have so adequately provided the framework of expeditionary force capabilities for the other services to emulate, the Air Force has taken its place as a team player. Not only is this necessary to meet the increased need for force projection around the world but a small, lethal, low cost expeditionary Air Force will provide the CJCS with a decisive and timely strike capability that is relatively low cost.

USACOM, USSOCOM, USEUCOM, and USPACOM personnel attended the AEF Symposium held at Shaw AFB in December 1996 with the intention of implementing the same type force within their Areas of Responsibility. EUCOM and PACOM have the ability to develop similar AEF procedures; however, USSOCOM is a different story. As well, additional AEF Concepts Of Operations (COO) have surfaced since the development of the initial CENTCOM COO. For example, some believe that an AEF is any show of force by Air Force strike teams within 36 hrs of notification. This could possibly include a flight of F-117 Stealth Fighters taking off out of Holloman AFB in New Mexico, joining up with tankers in the Mediterranean, striking targets in Libya, then returning to CONUS. Others see the AEF as the ability to mobilize and deploy manpower and parts to re-supply in minimal time so a large logistical base would not be

required in-theater. This would require in-CONUS alert status but would be more cost efficient than forward deployed forces. Clearly, the Air Force believes that the AEF is the likely solution to the forward deployed, high priced, decisive force of the present, but the exact definition is undecided. Depending on the situation, the likely outcome will probably be a combination of the above scenarios. While the CENTCOM AEF is feasible for Joint Task Force/Southwest Asia (JTF/SWA), 7th AF in the Pacific may define the AEF as a strike force able to take off and land from the same location. In turn, EUCOM could possibly define the AEF as a rapid re-supply force that will keep the cost of forward deployed units to a minimum. Whatever the scenario or location, the USAF is making an effort to maintain capability during this critical downsizing period.

The most difficult AOR to project air power concepts are in the USEUCOM's southern AOR. Central Africa has been the focus of MOOTW operations over the last several years and Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State, has emphasized that our military will be more frequently in support of these types of operations in the near future. The problems in Africa are the enormous size of the continent and lack of adequate base facilities -- to include: stressed concrete capable runways, POL storage, and routine maintenance capabilities. For the areas where there is adequate FOB facilities a standing agreement would have to be coordinated to ensure timely support. Minimum support is required for food and housing as AEF pre-deployment crew deploy with equipment to secure "tent cities" and chow hall facilities. The following paragraphs will suggest the likely make-up and execution of the AEF in the likes of Africa if the CENTAF COO was used.

Example

Central Africa Scenario

In December 1996 Zairian president Mobutu Sese Seku announced his intent to retire from political life. He had been in control since the country's independence back in 1961. He had not groomed a successor since he was confident that his son would take his place. However, Niua Sese Seku was totally uninterested. So, Mobutu announced free and open elections for the Presidency as his departing legacy to the democratic process.

This announcement precipitated civil uprisings in the eastern provinces that further exacerbated existing problems with the Hutu and Tutzi. Before the elections could take place the dissident elements declared "independence for both Nork-Kivu and Sud-Kivu" provinces. Given the lack of government services, resources and loyal national military elements in the provinces, the new capital in Kisangani was not immediately threatened by the national government of Zaire. Because of the lack of government services the resources and loyal national military elements in the provinces were minimal at best and unable to contain the uprising. The outcome was anarchy, which unfortunately resulted in widespread famine and civil unrest. In February 1997, the new President and former parliamentarian dissident Paul Tshikedi found himself unable to restore peace to the eastern regions.

During a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador to Kinshasa in mid-March 1997, Tshikedi advised the parliament that he would fully support their efforts to democratize his government and abide totally by the constitution which the U.S. Government had long heralded as "Democratic" while at the same time degenerating Mobutu for his demagogic

and despotic leadership. In an act of faith, Tshikedi released all political prisoners, reduced the size of the Zairian military by 200,000 and fully embraced the “structural adjustment” economic program authored by the World Bank.

As grand scale bloodshed continued in the east and the new “Independence Leadership” was unable to exert any control, in mid-April 1997 Tshikedi asked for U.S. military support to quell the uprising in the eastern provinces and provide humanitarian assistance. While suggesting operational use of the airports in Kamina and Goma as well as N’djili airport in the capital of Kinshasa, Tshikedi indicated that Kamina, which had formerly enjoyed U.S. military functions, would best serve U.S. purposes even though Kamina is farther from the conflict than Goma.

Also, in mid-April, Republic of South Africa’s President Nelson Mandela telephoned President Clinton endorsing and fully supporting U.S. military intervention and assistance to the war-torn area of eastern Zaire. Mandela also offered a resolution before the organization of African unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in late April asking that body to endorse U.S. or United Nations intervention in eastern Zaire. The vote will go before the OAU General Assembly in June 1998 and next to unanimous endorsement is expected; however, if immediate military intervention is not provided, millions of people will most definitely be brutally killed.⁴

U.S. Response

The NCAs suggest that the CENTCOM AEF mobilize immediately (NLT 03190000Z) in support of the democratically elected and motivated Zairian government. Immediate sorties (NLT 03210000Z) will be in support of the Tshikedi forces to

neutralize all advances by the “Independent Leadership” in Zaire. Although there is no standing “bed-down agreement” with Zaire, the Secretary of Defense has full support from the Zairian government to use Kamina airport, a small but adequate airstrip on the western border previously occupied by U.S. forces. Of greatest concern is the current condition of the airfield. Air Force maintenance and OSI personnel determined that ramp space/condition and POL facilities are below standards but adequate for the short term. With the airfield being only one hundred miles from the areas of concern, OSI suggests additional force protection personnel must be provided to ensure a safe operations environment. The AEF has the ability to carry enough supplies to support a two day operation but must be re-supplied as soon as possible. As well, the Zairian government agreed to provide additional equipment for sustainment and force protection. C-141 aircraft may be used for transport but must be escorted by F-15/16 fighters until neutralization of enemy air defenses.

AEF Composition

- 975 support personnel

- 12 F-15C from Langley AFB, Virginia

- 12 F-16CG from Shaw AFB, North Carolina

- 12 F-16CJ from Shaw AFB, North Carolina

- 2 B-52 from Minot AFB, North Dakota

- 4 C-130 from Pope AFB, North Carolina

- 2 KC-135 from Tinker AFB, Oklahoma

The set-up crew will consist of 300 support personnel and 38 pilots. Following landing, 30 pilots will be on immediate crew rest for a 03210300Z take-off.

Mission FRAG Order

On 18 March 1997 at 0000Z 2 C-141s will transport the set-up crew to Kamina. 6 F-15C Air Superiority Fighters along with 4 F-16CJ fighters carrying anti-radiation missiles will escort the C-141 to the airfield. Following the arrival of the set-up crew, an estimated 6 hours will be required to prep the airfield for operations. The remainder of the force will arrive at Kamina NLT 03200000Z. The first operational sortie will take off at 03200200Z. The 2 B-52s will take off from Minot to meet a 03200300Z Time Over Target (TOT) followed by a recovery at Kamina. A coordinated SEAD mission of 4 F-16CJ aircraft will be escorted by 6 F-15C aircraft. 12 F-16CG aircraft carrying GBU-12 precision guided munitions will be targeted on 12 pre-planned targets provided to the AEF commander upon arrival in theater. The C-130s will arrive at Kamina NLT 03190000Z with re-supplies to maintain 48 hour surge operations. Following support will be flown in as needed. The U.S. center of gravity has been identified as the ability of the Host Nation to support operations. The host nation must supply JP-5 fuel and additional police forces to ensure a safe operating environment. The AEF Commander has identified the POL sites, host nation runway maintenance crews, and base protection personnel as critical vulnerabilities. Force protection is critical for the success of the mission.

Challenges

One can see that the risk associated with CONUS-based rapid reaction air forces are numerous. The most probable concern for the Commander is the self-induced “fog and friction” associated with unfamiliarity -- not knowing the environment will place a tremendous strain on the Commander. He will need all available resources, to include a sharp OSI staff, enabling him to effectively write the Commander’s Intent and to develop accurate assumptions. Another associated risk will be his reliance on the host nation to support all operational phases. It is imperative for the Commander to be able to devote his undivided attention to the mission. For example, his thoughts cannot be on the condition of the runway or the fuel quality. Such distractions could have a detrimental effect on his performance.

An additional Commander’s challenge is the AEF’s coordination prior to deployment. The probability of coordinated operations without a rigorous, well-defined training program is difficult at best. In turn, the troop’s AOR unfamiliarity will compound the problem. The Commander may have as little as 24 hour prior notice and will be dependent on up-to-date, well-developed skeleton plans to provide the operation baseline. He will have to trust all participants are up to speed on the essential mission requirements as he develops his course of action. Although this is not an exhaustive list of concerns, one can see that the AEF Commander’s challenges are numerous.

Recommendations

The success of an Air Expeditionary Force is dependent upon all the pieces fitting into harmonious place with little or no confusing pauses. To be so dependent on the Host Nation for supplies and protection greatly increases the risk and could possibly endanger the RAPID and RESPONSIVE AEF tenets. If the Host Nation is negligent, it is possible the AEF could land with all its air power and be grounded for several days. In the meantime, the enemy is meeting his objectives with little or no resistance. Therefore, the first recommendation is that the Commands share a clearly defined and coordinated priority check-list with the host nation. This will include periodic airfield inspections. Yearly evaluated exercises will highlight lessons learned. This is not that unusual for the Air Force. FOBs were established in Europe during the Cold War with NATO Tactical Evaluation teams grading every move.

A second recommendation is focused on peacetime training that ensures a smooth transition into theater. I am convinced that for the NCAs to retain a credible expeditionary air force that can transition seamlessly into theater 365 days a year, a robust training program will be necessary. CENTAF is on its way to validating the CENTCOM AEF but, to date, has not established a regular training or inspection schedule. One money-saving technique the Air Force has implemented since the Gulf War is 120 day personnel rotation cycle to Southwest Asia and Bosnia. Although this technique has saved valuable dollars compared to in-place forces, the operational capability of our fighter units has taken a beating. In the 80's the majority of fighter squadrons were 85% mission ready -- today, with half the fighter wings, the readiness status is as low as 50% -- mostly due to the lack of effective training in non-combatant theaters. As well, international flight restrictions during non-combatant operations have

been an additional training challenge. Trying to secure Military Operations Areas (MOA) in foreign airspace is next too impossible. Few host nations are willing to give up valuable airline airspace for foreign military training areas.

In line with training, AEF designated personnel must be placed on continuous 24 hour alert status. For this to become a reality the 120 day deployment cycle must be changed. Simply put, the Air Force does not have the personnel to support a 120 day cycle and an AEF capable force. A maximum of 90 day deployment will be required to effectively man the AEF. As Fighter Wings establish AEF training priorities and the current deployment cycle is reduced, combat capability will increase and the reality of providing the NCAs with expeditionary air power will be possible.

Conclusion

With the Air Expeditionary Force is in its infancy, there has been considerable debate on what the AEF should entail. CENTCOM has one idea for Southwest Asia that appears to be effective; however, an AEF may be completely different for USEUCOM, USSOCOM, or even PACOM. Central Africa proposes certain challenges that are unique. One can only speculate what the concerns will be for the AEF Commander. Depending on the conflict, the current CENTCOM COO is feasible but will most probably be modified as the situation dictates.

For the AEF to be expeditionary -- and for that matter, effective -- the host nation must not only agree to provide a suitable airfield but also be willing to maintain it during peacetime. As well, locations must be strategically determined and updated depending on the threat environment. Regular training and evaluations are required to ensure the

AEF Commander's focus is on the threat and not bogged down with administrative details.

The AEF has the possibility to be a tremendous asset to the President. Its ability to meet specific theater needs by providing RAPID, RESPONSIVE, and RELIABLE airpower is enviable. The savings over an in-theater air force is substantial and it provides the NCAs flexibility to practically wait until the last minute to commit forces -- especially as it relates to the future, non-linear battlefield -- 'Check six'.

Notes

¹ Air Expeditionary Force Playbook (Bahrain), United States Central Command; 609th Combat Operations Squadron, 524 Shaw Dr., Ste 124, Shaw AFB, SC 29152; pg 1.

² Background Paper on Air Expeditionary Force, Maj Pfaff, A3DOOC, 3004, 21 Oct 96

³ Air Expeditionary Force Lessons Learned; AEF Symposium; Dec 1996; Shaw AFB.

⁴ Chatfield, Chris., Interview with Dr Chatfield for scenario development; 15 Jan 1997.